



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Tibet: American Foreign Policy and National Security

March 2022

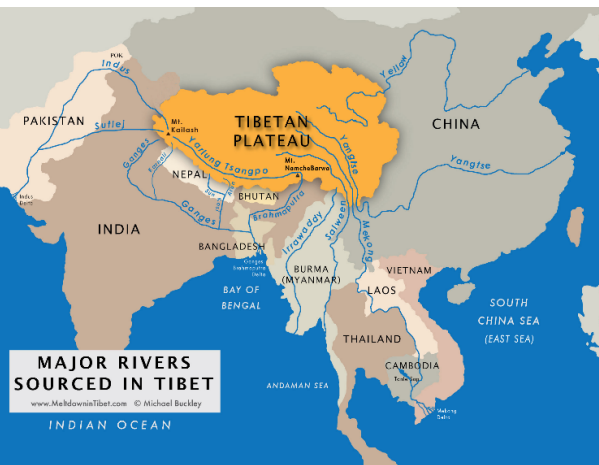
SUMMARY

Over the last three decades, China has maneuvered itself from a pariah state following the Tiananmen Square Massacre to a global economic and political powerhouse. Particularly under the regime of President Xi Jinping (2012-present), the Chinese government has established clear ambitions to secure an alternative international order based on authoritarian Chinese Communist Party rule. This attempted remaking of the international order explicitly rejects American leadership and the values of democracy and rule of law while seeking to place China in the global driver's seat.

The United States and like-minded nations are already responding on multiple fronts to this destabilizing agenda. However, the strategic importance of Tibet in regard to China's expansionist agenda has not yet been fully addressed, ceding an important front to the PRC. Far from being a peripheral concern, China's annexation of Tibet is a key factor in regional politics and Sino-American relations. The following interrelated issues must be more directly confronted:

- Annexation of Tibet and Tibet's unresolved international status
- Regional water security
- China's expanding surveillance capacity
- Transnational repression

BROKEN PROMISES: TIBET'S UNRESOLVED INTERNATIONAL STATUS



Soon after Communists assumed power in China in 1949, they annexed Tibet. Situated about 4,000 meters above sea level, the Tibetan Plateau is a geographic region spanning 1 million square miles bordering India, Bhutan, Nepal and Burma, providing a commanding position over the countries of the Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia.

India, the largest democracy in the world and a key US partner in balancing China's growing strength in Asia, has faced repeated military conflicts with China, particularly along the now-contested borders that India previously held with Tibet without fear of incursion.

- Significantly, during the process of annexation, the agreement China forced the Tibetan side to sign in 1951 under duress explicitly promised Tibet meaningful autonomy and protection of its distinct identity. These promises were quickly broken and remain broken to this day.
- As a combined result of intense international pressure and China's inability to bring Tibetans under control, China has occasionally made an effort to appear that it is responding to calls to resolve the Tibetan issue through dialogue with representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In the most recent period, China spent nearly a decade in dialogue with the Tibetan side between 2002 and 2010, even while insisting on poison pill conditions. In 2010, China simply walked away from the table.
- Dialogue has not resumed since then, despite repeated requests from the United States and other major countries.

A mutually beneficial solution on Tibet between representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government has the potential to reduce regional conflict and instability by securing India's northern border and removing water conflicts from China's relations with south and southeast Asia. It also would set a precedent in which China uses dialogue with sincerity to resolve disputes without violence, which is particularly critical as China increases its threatening posture toward Taiwan and authoritarian leaders like Vladimir Putin begin aligning with China and other anti-democratic regimes.

WEAPONIZING WATER: INTERNATIONAL WATER SECURITY

Entities such as the US Intelligence Community, the Stimson Center and the Atlantic Council have identified Southeast Asian water insecurity as a significant potential driver of conflict. More specifically, as Professor Brahma Chellaney, a specialist in international security, stated, "all of Asia's major rivers originate on the Tibetan Plateau, and China is erecting an expansive hydro-infrastructure to make itself the upstream water controller."

- Up to 2 billion people across the Asian continent depend on the healthy flow of Tibet's rivers. The PRC has openly declared its plan to construct dozens more dams on Tibet's rivers in the decade ahead.
- Extensive damming will give China the capacity to turn the region's water tap on and off. Coupled with fear of food and economic instability, China's water control makes for an increasingly volatile situation for downstream riparian countries.
- This is not speculative. According to Stimson Center's 2019 documentation, China withheld water behind dams for six months while downstream countries experienced an unprecedented drought.
- Ignoring China's water agenda will grant China another tool to establish outsized regional control over downstream nations, literally and diplomatically.

SURVEILLANCE STATE

The CCP has converted Tibet into a surveillance state combining more brutal oppressive techniques with constant monitoring and information control. China's technological surveillance and race-based monitoring and tracking present a clear danger to US and global interests, as the "innovations" China makes in Tibet are unlikely to stay there.

- Internet blackouts and intrusive electronic surveillance are now pervasive at all levels of society in Tibet, creating a model for an authoritarian panopticon that monitors the movements, phone calls, and internet habits of every citizen.
- Chinese companies have developed software that automatically detects and tracks Tibetans and other ethnic minorities within the PRC on camera. Sale of these "advances" abroad opens the possibility for regimes around the duplicate China's institutional racism and racial profiling.
- Major news outlets have reported China's deployment of "genetic surveillance," focused intensely on Tibetans and Uyghurs.

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

China's repression of Tibetans does not end at China's borders. American citizens of Tibetan ancestry have been subject to harassment, intimidation and surveillance by the Chinese Communist Party, turning Tibet into an issue of American national security.

- The Chinese Embassy and the consulates in the United States employ members of the United Front Work Department under the guise of diplomatic staff. These individuals have the task of undertaking surveillance in the Tibetan American community and implementing programs to win them over.
- In 2020, an American citizen named Baimadajie Angwang serving in the NYPD was arrested for acting as an agent of the Chinese government; he was charged with reporting to China on the Tibetan American community in the United States.
- In early 2022, the Justice Department announced one of five individuals charged with harassing and spying on US citizens on behalf of the PRC had done so against Tibetan activists.
- In March 2022, the State Department imposed visa restrictions on Chinese officials responsible for transnational repression, specifically citing their actions aimed at repressing Tibetans abroad.
- Tibetan organizations based outside the PRC regularly face hacking attempts, DDoS attacks and more, while Tibetans themselves endure state-sponsored digital surveillance—even in the United States.

- Beyond the borders of the United States, the CCP has targeted the Tibetan community in Nepal, to the extent of forcing the government of Nepal to deny fundamental rights to the Tibetan refugee community there as a way to stifle their struggle.

CONCLUSION

In Tibet, the world sees a vivid illustration of the difference between the values championed by America and China. It could not be clearer that China seeks to create a stranglehold on Southeast Asia, and that the Tibetan Plateau is an integral part of its agenda, which if successful will negatively impact US National Security. The United States must not hesitate to:

- Build a regional consensus among Asia's democracies about the importance of the Tibet issue and the need to end the Chinese occupation.
- Champion the human rights of the Tibetan people and their inherent right to democratic self-rule, and contrast the CCPs authoritarianism to the principles of freedom and rights promoted by the United States and regional leaders like India, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.
- Lead like-minded nations to consistently demand China resume dialogue with the Tibetans. Dialogue cannot be raised simply to check off the list; there must be an expectation that the issue will be resolved and a willingness to increase the pressure on the PRC if current methods are found to be ineffective.
- Ally with regional partners to foster a comprehensive, stable Southeast Asia water security program.
- Fully implement the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act and the Tibetan Policy and Support Act. These important laws help address the foreign policy and national security interests of the United States but will require concerted effort from the State Department to deliver the intended impact.
- Oppose China's efforts to foster an environment of fear and distrust within the United States. Policies to bar investment in and export of repressive technology should be established, as well as programs to ensure that the Tibetan American community is safe from intimidation and harassment by the Chinese government.



International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) | 1825 Jefferson Place NW | Washington, DC 20036 | United States of America
Phone: (202) 785-1515 | Fax: (202) 785-4343 | info@savetibet.org

ICT Europe
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
icteurope@savetibet.nl

ICT Deutschland e.V.
Berlin, Germany
info@savetibet.de

ICT Brussels
Brussels, Belgium
info@savetibet.eu